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Report Highlights:

Lunch boxes, *bento*, whiskey (again) and standing-only bars are all trends that are in this month's issue.

Japan Food Trends (JFT) communicates Japanese food and lifestyle trends that may help U.S. exporters to generate product and marketing ideas.

General Information:

Editor's Note:

Variety and choice are good words to describe this issue of JFT and perhaps the Japanese market. Like the United States there is much diversity especially when it comes to food. Cooking schools, beverage manufacturers and standing bar

owners are adopting new perspectives and offering classes and products that fit today's demands.

Culinary

Cooking Classes for Men, Nikkei MJ, August 24, 2009, page13

The current economic downturn is leading more men to prepare their own lunches and to cooking classes. ABC Cooking Studio developed a cooking class specifically to teach men how to prepare lunch boxes or *bento*.



The *bento* is part of Japanese lunch, outings and culture. Not everyone takes one to school or work, but a good percentage of Japanese do. The *bento* industry is quite intricate. *Bentos* are either, mass produced and sold through convenience stores, catered by restaurants and of course delivered, or made at home. For homemade *bentos*, *bento* boxes (usually two) and chopsticks sets are manufactured in many designs using *anime* characters or some are plain stainless steel. These *bento* boxes are similar to U.S. lunch boxes that may have Spiderman on all six panels or the heavy-duty type. The first box is filled with small bite size items such as sausage links, fish, fishcakes, beef, pork, fried chicken, *tempura*, etc., and some vegetables and slices of fruits. The other box is filled with rice and sometimes topped with a thin layer of dried seaweed, scrambled egg or pickled vegetables. Homemakers wake up an hour early to prepare these lunches. In addition to the headache of deciding what to make for dinner everyday, the *bento* is just as tormenting. There are many cookbooks and internet sites that give great tips and recipes.



<http://www.jcast.com/mongo/2009/02/19036259.ht>

Men who prepare their own *bentos* have been nicknamed “bento-danshi”, meaning “box lunch man”. The studio expects 100 *bento-danshi* per month, and the lesson fee is 4,000 yen with material costs included. They plan to expand their lessons in Ginza and Nagoya by October, this year.

Many people are being conscious economically and making their own lunch. They manage to save money because they don’t have to spend money to eat out every lunch. It is also a trend for men to cook as a hobby. In response to this trend, book publishers are publishing more cooking books for men.

From the Editor:

It’s almost like an art and some homemakers pride themselves with their productions. It’s not just the taste. It’s taking into consideration temperature and difficult-to-spoil items. It’s being sure that your child’s *bento* looks and tastes as good or better than his/her peers. It’s color, design, creativity, compactness, variety packed into a tiny work of art. I couldn’t do it, but I do enjoy a *bento* once in a while.

Alcoholic Beverage

Suntory’s Highball Comeback, Nikkei MJ, August 21, 2009, page18

Dispel the old images of whiskey. Whiskey is now an alcoholic beverage enjoyable for any age group. Highball, whiskey mixed with soda, was first introduced in the 1950’s, almost disappeared from the bar-scene as total whiskey consumption fell, but it is back. It dominated the alcoholic beverage market when it was first introduced, but it’s been forgotten when beers and wines gained market share.



<http://www.hotpepper.jp/strJ000002012/food/>

Suntory has come up with a new idea to promote whiskey to take back market share. According to a customer survey that

Suntory conducted, the strongest image of whiskey is that it is “for the older generation”, followed by “it’s too strong”, and “bars that target young consumers don’t serve whiskey.” To eliminate those negative reputations, Suntory has produced TV commercials using young celebrities to show that whiskey can be enjoyed by young and old. Suntory is working with bars and restaurants to promote Highball and whiskey. They promote Highball by combining them with special dishes that are prepared and presented on the restaurants’ menus. Highball does go well with Japanese, ethnic, or any type of foods.

Regarding the strong taste of whiskey, it is easier to drink Highball because it is mixed with soda water 1 to 4, which makes the alcohol level 8%. Supermarkets are also supporting Suntory by displaying whiskey and soda water next to each other on the same shelf space.

From the Editor:

This is probably the second or third time to write about Highballs, but it is truly back. Without disclosing too much information out of fear of divulging my age, these Highballs were the hottest thing in Japan in the 80’s. It’s good to see them back on restaurant and bar menus. Perhaps more enjoyable is that it adds another drink I can enjoy. This trend will hopefully lead to other nostalgic spirits and liquors that once dominated the Japanese alcoholic market.

Restaurant

Drink, Eat and Chat Inexpensively, The Daily Yomiuri, August 29, 2009, page 3



<http://www.shibukei.com/headline/photo/3717/>

Standing-only bars are popular. As its name suggests, standing-only bars don’t have seats and there is standing room only. Standing-only bars offer low priced foods and drinks. Small and cozy, these bars are very relaxed and the casual atmosphere allows customers to start up conversations with complete strangers that eventually turn into drinking buddies. Combination of low priced food and drinks, and comfort are what makes standing-only bars so popular. Standing-only bars are actually not so much of a new trend- its boom started in 2004. In the 1990’s there were about 150 standing-only bars in Tokyo. Today there are approximately 600 standing-only bars.

From the Editor:

I just had a few drinks and great conversations with old buddies last week. And this was after dinner. These standing-only bars are convenient and inexpensive enough to lure you in for another. To make sure there won’t be any misconceptions, it not a “guys” thing. The decorum and atmosphere are usually simple and appeal to women too.

